

Stress Mutual Understanding In the Face of Inter-Civilization Clash

Mohammad Hosni Mubarak
President of the Arab Republic of Egypt

Egyptian President Mohammad Hosni Mubarak addressed the Formentor Forum in Spain, on Nov. 2, 2001, making proposals for a Middle East peace, and for a dialogue of civilizations. Speaking on the tenth anniversary of the Madrid peace conference, in the context of the European-Mediterranean dialogue, Mubarak made clear that peace could be achieved if the Mitchell Commission Report recommendations were implemented. The last part of President Mubarak's speech was dedicated to documenting how Islamic-Arab culture has played a positive role in European civilization. Subheads have been added to the excerpts which follow.

In March of this year, I received with appreciation an invitation from my dear friend President Aznar in March of this year, to speak to you at the inaugural deliberations of the third annual meeting of the Forum on "The Impact of Enlarging the European Union on the Euro-Mediterranean Process." . . . In addressing this topic, I cannot miss a number of international and regional developments that have taken place since I accepted this invitation early this year. These events will, undoubtedly, reflect on the progress to be achieved in the future in the Euro-Mediterranean process. Particularly, the September 11 events in the United States, have deeply shaken the hearts of each and every one of us, and have created new international conditions and implications that need to be examined and taken into consideration. Add to this the situation in the Middle East that continues to deteriorate day after day, without the least glimpse of hope of reaching in the near future a peaceful settlement to the conflict that has persisted for over half a century. . . .

Our discussions, particularly at this stage, should be guided by a clear vision of our joint objectives of beefing up elements of integration and unity, in the face of those of separation and division. We need also to stress existing integration and mutual understanding between civilizations, in the face of advocates of inter-civilization clash. We should also bolster the use of all religions for support-

ing elements of tolerance and love, against those of evil and aggression, and for elevating noble and sublime human values so high as to prevail over constricted national interests. Thus, we would be establishing for ourselves and for the generations to come, underpinnings for a new World order that we had aspired to achieve by the dawn of the new millennium, which will hopefully bring to all of us prosperity, stability, and peace. . . .

The Arab-Israeli Conflict

[D]ebates on the political and security aspects of the Euro-Mediterranean process at all levels have revealed the pivotal importance of achieving a peaceful settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict necessary to bring about the required political and socio-economic integration between East and South Mediterranean countries. This would eventually push the Euro-Mediterranean process towards new, wider horizons.

Within this framework, Europe has already exerted intensive efforts over years, with a view to reaching a comprehensive settlement based on international legitimacy and justice. These, together with concomitant and consistent American, Russian, and United Nations endeavors, had led to the convening in 1991 of the Madrid Peace Conference, that adopted the Madrid

terms of reference, based on the principle of “Land for Peace” and relevant Security Council resolutions, primarily Resolutions 242, 338, and 425.

Today, ten years after the Madrid Peace Conference, our responsibility calls on us to identify causes underlying the dramatic deterioration of the peace process in a manner that would negatively affect the overall climate within the Mediterranean region and will consequently reflect on Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, as well as on the situation within the European Union member countries themselves.

On the Palestinian track, there arose several factors conducive to the current deterioration of the peace process. These can be summed up in the following:

First: Different approaches by successive Israeli leaders to peace as a strategic goal requiring commitment to mutual obligations as well as sacrifices in order to acquire gains and to realize sublime goals.

In spite of late [Israeli] Prime Minister Rabin’s profound political vision of peace and his bold steps toward achieving a comprehensive settlement—for all this, he, together with Prime Minister Shimon Peres, are deemed as ever the most conscious among Israeli prime ministers of the importance of peace for his country and for the region. Nevertheless, his assassination has made succeeding prime ministers reluctant to adopt moderate stances. Hence, they gave in to domestic Israeli reactions to certain acts of violence here and there, without focussing on the main objective goal of achieving peace and stability.

This has resulted in reluctance by Israel to fulfill its commitments as stipulated in the Oslo, Wye River, and the first Sharm El Sheikh signed agreements, under a variety of political and security pretexts. Moreover, it intentionally allowed certain events offensive to religious feelings to take place, thus sparking the second Palestinian uprising “Intifada.”

Second: There exists an erratic lack of recognition of the Palestinian Authority’s limit of powers in negotiations, particularly relating to Islamic sanctities, to which the hearts and souls of each and every Muslim all over the world are attached, on top of which is the status of the Old City of Jerusalem and al-Haram al-Sharif in particular.

Israel has sought to persuade the public opinion in the U.S.A. and Europe that [Palestinian Authority] President Arafat, by not accepting Israeli sovereignty over al-Haram al-Sharif, has wasted an historic chance to reach a settlement during the second Camp David summit. It sought also to use this to intimate that President Arafat is either unwilling or incapable of reaching a settlement.

However, to be honest, I must admit that President Arafat was not in a position to accept this part of the set-

tlement in light of the Arab and Islamic rejection of granting sovereignty to Israel over the entire East Jerusalem, being a part of the Arab territories occupied since 1967, including sovereignty over Islamic sanctities.

In addressing this point, I speak not out of bias to one party against the other, but rather out of a belief in the sensitive nature of any subject that touches on religions and holy places. Mishandling such issues could only ignite latent deep feelings of antagonism, from which we could all suffer for many years to come. . . .

Fifth: The entire world community sees that the way out of the present dilemma of the peace process lies in the honest implementation of the Mitchell Report. This report contains a significant number of mutual obligations that, if carried out by both parties without dictating unworkable conditions, could lead to a concrete breakthrough. This would eventually bring about security to Israeli citizens inside their own state, in return for the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state that also enjoys security and stability.

It should be emphasized that it is a gross mistake to maintain that the September 11 events were the outcome of difficulties encountered in the Middle East peace process, or a result of the support of the U.S.A. to Israel. However, the deterioration of the peace process down to the current regrettable level and lack of active international leadership of the peace process for one reason or another, have created a public opinion that is antagonistic to the peace process in the Arab street. This is clearly reflected in the form of harsh criticisms of the decision by Arab leaders to adopt peace as a strategic option at a time when present Israeli practices and policies can never anyhow be interpreted as a genuine orientation toward peace. . . .

Combatting Terrorism

Moving to Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in terms of security, I find it necessary to talk about the sorrowful events of the September 11

Upon tackling this subject, I speak out of a bitter experience endured by Egypt in its war against terrorism, which had started long before the September 11 incidents. From that experience, we have learned that terrorism should be confronted with vigor and determination within the bounds of legitimacy and respect of law.

Thus, Egypt did not hesitate for a second to join international efforts against terrorism in the wake of the attack on New York and Washington. This stems from our belief in the importance of forming a united international front that stands against the evils of terrorism and prevent it from attaining its objectives. Within the same

context, Egypt has supported international moves by the U.S.A. and U.K. to combat terrorism.

Within the framework of our international efforts to combat terrorism and eliminate all its strongholds, we should always take into consideration a number of factors that could augment our chances of success, foremost of which are:

First: The need to convene an international conference on combating terrorism under the auspices of the U.N., in order to conclude an international treaty involving strict procedures geared to agree on an all-inclusive definition of international terrorism, to prohibit provision of finance, assistance, safe haven, or political asylum to terrorists for one reason or another. This is what we should all seek to achieve in due course, after addressing the immediate consequences of the September 11 events.

Second: The extreme importance of coupling our efforts in combating international terrorism with intensive efforts to address its underlying causes, such as feelings of injustice, coercion, inequity, and adoption of double standards for political, economic or social considerations. . . .

Islamic Culture and European Civilization

[Addressing closer European Union-Mediterranean relations, President Mubarak said they would] . . . enrich the joint experience of all parties to the Barcelona Process and will enhance mutual understanding of our respective cultural and humanitarian idiosyncrasies, including our traditions, habits, and values handed down over the years.

Undoubtedly, the rich historic background of each and every one of us reveals a mutual belief in the unity of values and cultures among people, and refutes claims of inter-civilization conflict or clash. Such concepts emanate from erratic perceptions and a false sense by others of the superiority of this or that civilization. Together with ungrounded theories and concepts of the overriding superiority of a specific race over others, [such concepts] are obsolete and outdated.

We should not allow them to make distinctions between one human being and another. Nor should we let them take us back to the Dark Ages, where human beings were torn between a strong urge to achieve progress, on one hand, and attempts by some to yield to backward theories that have no basis in science, religion, or rational thinking, on the other. These concepts, rather, stem from calls based on ignorance and rejection of the other, simply on grounds of difference in belief or means of achieving progress.

It may be quite opportune these days to recall to memory those bright eras of flourishing civilizations where

man could soar to higher levels of intellectual and scientific advancement.

Man had then realized that human civilization was one and the same, no matter how different its sources and components were. Man also grasped the historical fact, which proved for us all that whatever advances and progress man scored in a specific region, would add up to human heritage that is composed of interwoven and cumulative layers, eventually making up this firm-grounded structure of culture and civilization.

Our understanding of such relations between civilizations stems from the basic principles of Islam, that considers belief in former Divine Messages as a prerequisite for sound faith in Islam. In the Holy Qur'an, Allah Almighty says, "The messenger believeth in that which hath been revealed unto him from his Lord and (so do) the believers. Each one believeth in Allah and His angels and His scriptures and His messengers, we make no distinction between any of his messengers." The Holy Qur'an also confirms that religion can never serve as grounds for clash, by saying, "There is no compulsion in religion. The right direction is henceforth distinct from error." This also shows that relationships among civilizations and nations are one of dialogue rather than one of conflict, as shown by the following verses, "O mankind, Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another." And, "Argue ye not [with the People of the Scripture] except in the better ways." Thus, from a proper Islamic perspective, Muslims' belief in the universality of Islam does not imply the exclusive singularity of Islamic civilization in the world, nor its supremacy over other civilizations.

It rather means interaction with these civilizations, and emphasis that plurality of civilizations and diversity of cultures are the normal state of affairs.

This Islamic concept of universality is based on the fact that plurality, diversity, and variance are the rule and the law and that interaction with other civilizations is the proper median position between isolation and subordination.

The experience of history confirms this vision that we much cherish, in identifying relations between civilizations. The Arab Islamic civilization rose not to supersede, but rather to complement and advance oriental heritage.

Islam and Greek Philosophical Thought

In this context, Islam was influenced by Greek philosophical thought. The center of gravity for civilization had started to turn toward Europe during the Middle Ages, only after the Greek heritage had moved there through exactly Arab intermediation.

Probably, the most important factor that had made such influence possible was, that Arab Islamic civilization did not only preserve the Greek heritage, but also, through blending Greek philosophical thought with principles of Islamic religion, did give the Greek heritage such forms that made it easily acceptable to Christian Europe.

This resulted in the reactivation of European philosophy on grounds of advanced Greek thought, making cultural and intellectual advancement possible. The influence of Arab Islamic civilization was not exclusively confined to this philosophical aspect, but rather extended to other branches of Western civilization—in mathematics, physics, and medicine.

This made the age of the European Renaissance reflect, in turn, Arab Islamic influences already recorded and documented by many scholars of civilization and historians.

It is a source of our great pleasure in this context, that Muslims had not been solely the upholders of advancement in our Arab Islamic civilization; as Christians and Jews, who had lived under the umbrella of such civilization, made significant contributions to it.

This asserts the sublime essence of Arab Islamic civilization, far away from the concept of inter-civilization or inter-religion clash. Therefore, the current European civ-

ilization, from an historical perspective, was not solely an outcrop of European innovation alone, but also a complementary addition to oriental cultural and civilization heritage running down for thousands of years.

In the same logic, ongoing pursuit by Arabs and Muslims to bridge the huge gap that keeps them apart from scientific and technological achievements of current European civilization, should deeply grasp elements of progress entailed in European civilization, as well as the spirit of creativity and innovation, the ability to harness nature in the interest of man, and the substantial contributions in many spheres to humanity at large.

Thus, the cycles of civilizations' continuum are completed and the right significance of relationships between civilizations over ages is entrenched. This would undoubtedly create an air of optimism among us all as regards both Arab-European relations, in general, and future prospects of Euro-Mediterranean partnership, in particular. The Mediterranean countries have always been at the heart of creative cultural interactions witnessed in East-West relations.

Hence, it is no exaggeration to say that inter-civilization dialogue has been a common practice by Mediterranean countries throughout their different historic epochs. . . .

A Call for 'Dialogue Among Civilizations'

Seyyed Mohammad Khatami
President of the Islamic Republic of Iran

The high point of the United Nations Millennium Summit held in September, 2000, was reached before the summit formally convened, at a conference on the Dialogue of Civilizations. Co-sponsored by the United Nations, UNESCO, and the Islamic Republic of Iran—whose proposal that the year 2001 be designated the "Year of the Dialogue of Civilizations" was adopted by the U.N. at that time—the conference was attended by U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan, as well as the Presidents of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Namibia, Nigeria, Mali, Algeria, Indonesia, Latvia, Qatar, Georgia, Mozambique, and the foreign ministers of Costa Rica and India. President Khatami's speech, as reported by the Iranian News Agency, has been edited for publication, and subheads have been added.

The General Assembly of the United Nations has only recently endorsed the proposal of the Islamic Republic of Iran for dialogue among civilizations and cultures. Nevertheless, this proposal is attracting, day after day, increased support from numerous academic institutions and political organiza-

tions. In order to comprehend the grounds for this encouraging reception, it is imperative to take into account the prevailing situation in our world today, and to ponder the reasons for widespread discontentment with it. It is, of course, only natural for justice-seeking and altruistic human beings to feel discontented with

the status quo. . . . Today, in this esteemed gathering, allow me instead to begin with certain historical, theoretical, and, for the most part, non-political grounds for the call to a dialogue among civilizations. . . .

Persian thought and culture owes an immense debt to Islam as one of its primary springs of efflorescence. Islam embodies a universal wisdom. Each and every human individual living in each and every corner of time and place is potentially included in the purview of Islam. The Islamic emphasis on the essential humane quality, and its disdain for such elements as birth and blood, had conquered the hearts of those yearning for justice and freedom.

The prominent position accorded to rational thought in Islam, and the rejection of an allegedly strict separation between human thought and divine revelation, also helped Islam to overcome dualism in both latent and manifest forms.

Islamic civilization is indeed one of only a few world civilizations that have become consolidated and have taken shape around sacred text—in this case the Noble Qoran. The essential unity of the Islamic civilization stems from the unique call that reached all Islamic peoples and nations.

Its plurality derives from the diversity of responses evoked after Islam reached various nations. Herein lies the crux of diversity and plurality we observe in achievements of the Islamic civilization: a single message interpreted and understood in a variety of ways.

The Emergence of a ‘World Culture’

What we ought to consider in earnest today is the emergence of a World Culture. World Culture cannot and ought not overlook characteristics and requirements of native local cultures with the aim of imposing itself upon them. Cultures and civilizations that have naturally evolved among various nations in the course of history are constituted from elements that have gradually adapted to collective souls and to historical and traditional characteristics. As such, these elements cohere with each other and consolidate within an appropriate network of relationships.

In spite of all constitutive plurality and diversity, a unique form can be abstracted. On the other hand, World Culture presumes exchange emanating from cultural agents belonging to disparate geographical locations. Compared to local and national cultures, World Culture is a selective culture deliberately formed and abstracted from a natural set. This culture is therefore intrinsically non-uniform and non-mono-

lithic, both in form and in content. It also lacks any primary or essential elements, and as such there can exist no cross-composition between primary and secondary elements.

We can only hope to find a way out of this anarchy and chaos in civilizational form, through engaging all concerned parties in a dialogue where they can exchange knowledge, experience, and understanding of diverse areas of culture and civilization. Today, it is impossible to bar ideas from freely travelling between cultures and civilizations in disparate parts of the world. However, in the absence of dialogue among thinkers, scholars, intellectuals, and artists from various cultures and civilizations, the danger of cultural homelessness would seem imminent. Such a state of cultural homelessness, would deprive people of solace whether in their own culture or in the open horizon of World Culture.

Examination of social and political aspects of the past century has fortunately gone beyond mere critique of political activities of superpowers in the world. Regarding social theories and political ideologies as mere “narratives” has helped to [discredit] the excessively flamboyant claims of some Twentieth-century political philosophies and social theories. It is now aptly agreed that the exclusive claim of such ideologies to being “scientific” and “True” has indeed been arbitrary.

The notion of dialogue among civilizations undoubtedly raises numerous theoretical questions. Especially, when we attempt to redress this proposal in an academic context for philosophical, anthropological, sociological, and linguistic analysis, problems become more acute. I do not mean to belittle such intellectual and academic undertakings. I would rather want to stress that in formulating this proposal, the Islamic Republic of Iran presents an alternative paradigm for international relations. This should become more clear when we take comparative notice of prevailing paradigms of international relations. It is incumbent upon us to find the grounds for replacing it with a new one.

In order to call governments and peoples of the world to follow the new paradigm of dialogue among cultures and civilizations, we ought to learn from the world’s past experience, especially from the tremendous human catastrophes that took place in the Twentieth century. We ought to critically examine the . . . glorification of might.

From an ethical perspective, the paradigm of dialogue among civilizations requires that we give up the will-to-power; and [without] the will-to-empathy, compassion, and understanding, there would be no hope for the prevalence of order in our world. We ought to gallantly

combat this dearth of compassion and empathy in our world. The ultimate goal of dialogue among civilizations is not dialogue in and of itself, but attaining empathy and compassion.

Two Ways To Develop Dialogue

Esteemed participants, there are two ways to realize dialogue among civilizations:

1. The interaction and interpenetration of actual instances of cultures and civilizations with each other, resulting from a variety of factors, presents one model in which this dialogue takes place.

This mode of interaction is of course involuntary and optional, occurs in an unpremeditated fashion, and is driven primarily by vagaries of social events, geographical situation, and historical contingency.

2. Alternatively, dialogue among civilizations could also mean a deliberate dialogue among representative members of various civilizations, such as scholars, artists, and thinkers from disparate civilizational domains.

In this latter sense, dialogue entails a deliberate act based upon premeditated indulgence, and does not rise and fall at the mercy of historical and geographical contingency.

Even though human beings inevitably inhabit a certain historical horizon, we could still aim at “meta-historical” discourse. Indeed, meta-historical discussion of such eternal human questions as the ultimate meaning of life and death, or goodness and evil, ought to substantiate and enlighten any dialogue in political and social issues.

Without a discussion of fundamentals, and by simply confining attention to superficial issues, dialogue would not get us far from where we currently stand. When superficial issues masquerade as “real,” “urgent,” and “essential,” and where no agreement, or at least mutual understanding, obtains among parties to dialogue concerning what is truly fundamental, in all likelihood misunderstanding and confusion would proliferate, instead of empathy and compassion.

Travelling of ideas and cultural interaction and interpenetration recurs in human history as naturally and persistently as the emigration of birds in nature. Even the inauspicious and abhorrent waging of wars has sometimes led to the enrichment and strengthening of the cultures and civilizations involved. For instance, as a consequence of war, “Great Books” of various civilizations,

such as primary philosophical, literary, and sacred books, have become available to other civilizations.

Translation and interpretation of texts and symbols has always proved to be one of the prime venues for dialogue among civilizations and cultures. Today also, scholars, artists, and all concerned should embark on a methodical re-reading and a deeply reflective re-interpretation of “Great Books” of various cultures and civilizations of our world. . . .

It is difficult to make a transition from one to the other. One of the most arduous passages in the road of dialogue among cultures arises when a party to the dialogue attempts to communicate with another by employing a basically secularist language in an essentially sacred and spiritual discourse. By secularism I mean the general rejection of any intuitive spiritual experience and any belief in the unseen. Such a dialogue would, of necessity, turn out to be absurd. The true essence of humanity is more inclusive than language, and this more encompassing nature of the existential essence of humanity makes it meaningful to hope for fruitful dialogue.

It now appears that the Cartesian-Faustian narrative of Western civilization should give way and begin to listen to other narratives proposed by other human cultures. Today, the unstoppable destruction of nature stemming from the ill-founded preconceptions of recent centuries threatens human livelihood. Should there be no other philosophical, social, political, and human grounds necessitating dialogue but this pitiable relationship between humans and nature, then all selflessly peace-seeking intellectuals should endeavor to promote dialogue as urgently as they could.

One goal of dialogue among cultures and civilizations is to recognize and to understand not only cultures and civilizations of others, but those of “one’s own.” We could know ourselves by taking a step away from ourselves and embarking on a journey away from self and homeland and eventually attaining a more profound appreciation of our true identity. It is only through immersion into another existential dimension that we could attain mediated and acquired knowledge of ourselves, in addition to the immediate and direct knowledge of ourselves that we commonly possess. Through seeing others we attain a hitherto impossible knowledge of ourselves. . . .

Great Artists Should Get Recognition

In dialogue among cultures and civilizations, great artists should undoubtedly get due recognition, together with philosophers, scholars, and theologians. For artists

do not glance at the sea, mountain, and the forest as mere mines and sources of energy, oil, and fuel. For the artist, the sea embodies the waving music of a heavenly dance; the mountain is not just a mass of dirt and boulder; and the forest not merely as inanimate timber to cut and use. By excluding the artist's "innocent" understanding from the political and social realm, human beings fall down to the ranks of the tool-making working animal. Such a being would surely look with disdain at the possibility of dialogue, and any empathy or compassion that may result from it. A world so thoroughly controlled by political, military, and economic conditions inevitably begets the ultimate devastation of the environment, and the eradication of all spiritual, artistic, and intuitive havens.

This would result in a dreary world in which the human "soul" can find no solace and no refuge. The inevitable fate of such a world is nothing but nihilism. Rational thinking of the philosopher, the learned language of the scholar, and the earnest efforts of the social engineer cannot suffice to remedy this nihilism. We need the magical touch and spell of the enchanted artist and the inspired poet to rescue life, at least part of it, from the iron clasp of death and to make possible the continuation of life.

Poets and artists engage in dialogue within and through the sacred language of spirit. This language has remained safe from poisonous winds of time, and in the very cold and merciless season of faithlessness it still brings us good news of original human ideals. It still calls people to persist on the path of hope and faith. As some thinkers have emphasized, the present situation of man in nature is indeed a tragic one. The sense of solitude and monologue and the anxiety rooted within it embody this tragic world. Our call to dialogue is aimed at soothing this sense of tragedy. We do not want to trivialize deep-rooted and genuine human pains, nor to propose a superficial panacea for profound human questions concerning the meaning of life and death. However, in the course of dialogue, the way in which various cultures and civilizations embrace and encounter grounds for tragedy should beneficially be discussed.

In addition to poetic and artistic experience, [there are] mysticism, language, or dialogue. Mystical experience, constituted of the revelation and countenance of the sacred in the heart and soul of the mystic, opens new existential pathways to the human spirit. A study of mystical achievements of various nations reveals to us the deepest layers of their "life experience" in the most universal sense. The unified mystical meaning and content across cultures, and the linguistic parallelism among mys-

tics, despite vast cultural, historical, and geographical distances, is indeed curious. . . .

Let Us Ask Themis To Set Aside Her Blindfold

The symbolic representation of Themis—goddess of divine Law and Justice—has already gained virtually global acceptance, as its statue appears on judiciary courts of many nations. It is now time to ask Themis to remove her blindfold. Let us ask her to set aside the lofty scale that currently weighs political and economic might as the sole measure. Instead, she should call all parties to an open discussion in various domains of thought, culture, and civilization. She ought to look observantly at the evidence with open eyes, and by freeing herself from any prior obligations, she should finally charge citizens of the world with the task of making political, economic, and cultural decisions.

At the very same time that political organizations and academic institutions consider and discuss various aspects of the proposal for dialogue among civilizations, the dialogue continues to take place day after day as a matter of fact. In the domains of economics, politics, and culture, problems and issues rarely remain local and indigenous. We all deeply engage in making use of each other's cultural and spiritual findings. The penetration of Eastern religions to the West, repercussions of Western political, cultural, and economic developments in the East, and most significantly, the expansion of global electronic communication have all rendered dialogue among civilizations a reality close to home. Gradually, these developments should penetrate to deeper layers of our lives. As elements of World Culture seep through—and these should, of course, be deliberately screened—common underground water tables would form connecting disparate cultural and geographical regions. The science of "semiotics" provides us with tools to excavate common underground links and thereby approach the "common language" that we need for any dialogue.

We should listen in earnest to what other cultures offer, and by relying on profound human experiences we can seek new ways for human life.

Dialogue is not easy. Even more difficult is to prepare and open up vistas upon one's inner existence to others. Believing in dialogue paves the way for vivacious hope: the hope to live in a world permeated by virtue, humility, and love, and not merely by the reign of economic indices and destructive weapons. Should the spirit of dialogue prevail, humanity, culture, and civilization should pre-

vail. We should all have faith in this triumph, and we should all hope that all citizens of the world would be prepared to listen to the divine call: “So Announce the Good News To My Servants—Those Who Listen To the Word, and Follow the Best [meaning] In It” (Holy Quran, 39: parts of 17, 18).

Let us hope that enmity and oppression should end,

and that the clamor of love for truth, justice, and human dignity should prevail. Let us hope that all human beings should sing along with Hafez of Shiraz, this divinely inspired spirit, that: “No ineffable clamor reverberates in the grand heavenly dome more sweetly than the sound of love.”

Thank you.

The Golden Renaissance And the Ecumenical Principle

Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr.

This selection is excerpted from “Jesus Christ and Civilization,” an essay drafted on Sept. 22, 2000, in response to Iranian President Seyyed Mohammad Khatami’s call earlier that month for the United Nations to designate the year 2001 as the “Year of the Dialogue of Civilizations” [SEE preceding article, page 39]. The full text of this essay appeared in the Winter 2000 issue of Fidelio (Vol. IX, No. 4). Subheads have been added.

The Fifteenth-century Renaissance was the birth of modern European civilization, and the expression of the noblest among the embattled forces which, ever since, have contested control over the field which has been that civilization. In modern European civilization since, we find nothing of crucial importance during the recent half-millennium, which is both good and novel, which is not derived from that Renaissance. Everything of significance which occurred within European civilization later, which was antagonistic to the fruits of that Renaissance’s Christian form of Classical Greek culture, has been a contribution to what is to be fairly described today, without exaggeration, as the Devil’s own work. . . .

The central institutional feature of the Golden Renaissance, is that it has been the greatest political revolution in the known existence of mankind, the introduction of the principle of the modern European form of sovereign nation-state.

This Renaissance, when considered as a model political revolution, considered in all of its characteristic features, is the third great revolutionary development in the entire history of globally extended European civilization. *For the first time in all presently known human existence, the entirety of the population of a nation was raised from the status of virtual human cattle, to a political condition, which, in principle, if not always in practice, is consistent with the Christian principle, that all persons are made equally in the*

image of the Creator, and that the efficient promotion of the general welfare of each and all of those people, and their posterity, is the sole basis for the legitimacy of government. For that reason, the Renaissance notion of the perfectly sovereign nation-state, has been the dividing line between good and evil, both in and outside the churches, ever since.

Without the revolutionary change in religious belief, created by Christ, and spread by the Christian Apostles and the martyrs, the creation of the modern sovereign form of nation-state would not have been possible. It was the passion embedded in Christianity which moved, and was unleashed by the Golden Renaissance.

Three principal elements combined to account for the possibility of this Renaissance.

First, the old, collapsed order was discredited, as the system of “free trade” and “globalization” is soon to become an object of both hatred and contempt, world wide, very soon now.

Second, there existed a kernel of new leadership qualified to inspire a growing number of others in a renaissance premised upon the Christian heritage of the Greek Classic.

Third, the principal qualification of those leaders of the Renaissance, was a relevant passion for cognition, as preferred over the relative sterility of

deductive method, as Cardinal Nicolaus of Cusa typifies those so affected and prepared, by cognitive labor, for their role.

It were sufficient for our purposes in this report, to focus discussion of the Renaissance itself upon those three elements.

To appreciate the roots of that Renaissance, we must take into account the continuing fact, that the curse of medieval and modern European civilization, to the present day, has been the legacy of the Roman Empire and its bestial doctrine of *vox populi* (e.g., “popular opinion,” “established customs,” “popular tastes,” “popular fashions,” “popular entertainment”). This is the evil of the pagan Latin-speaking legacy, as the case against it was documented by Augustine.

In the history of European feudalism, the specific form in which this Roman imperial legacy persisted, was, most notably, both the influence of the zero-population-growth practice prescribed by the Code of Diocletian, and the continued imposition of that Code by the Byzantine enemies of Alcuin and Charlemagne.*

Thus, despite liberators such as Charlemagne, and successors of Charlemagne such as the Emperor Frederick II, the feudal notion of “rule of law,” has remained, to this day, that decadent oligarchical perversion of the lately discredited U.S. Republican Representative Henry Hyde, or the brutish Magna Carta, the rule of feudal law, rule by globalization, by the legacy of imperial law, traced from old Babylon through the Code of the Emperor Diocletian. That notion of an axiomatically irrational system of “rule of law,” is the evil which we must act in concert to destroy, if the world is not to fall into a great new, planet-wide dark age, that of a duration of several decades or even much longer.

As typified by the life of Abelard of Paris, the political form of the great struggle to establish forms of society efficiently committed to the principle of man made in the image of the Creator, was concentrated in the issue of education of the young, especially the education of orphans and children from the families of the lower social estates, notably boys from the urban populations. If nations are to rule themselves according to natural law, rather than fall into the immoral corruption of mere custom (e.g., “tradition”) as such, where shall we find the rulers qualified to perform that function, and the general population to consent to and support such a political and social order? This is not possible in a nation such as the early English society depicted, allegorically, by Jonathan Swift: a nation of *Houyhnhnms* and *Yahoos*, such as the

popular-entertainment-ruined U.S.A. is becoming today.

All of the great religious teaching orders, the Augustinians and others, like the Brothers of the Common Life, centered their work in this mission. In the most relevant cases, as Abelard’s battle against unreason typifies this issue, the crucial point in educational policy, was that the young should not bend in blind obedience to the instruction issued from the teacher, but should re-experience the discovery and validation of those demonstrably truthful ideas which converged most nearly upon universal principles. In brief, the issue was that of choosing between defending “What I have been taught to say,” and being qualified to state and defend ideas which one has discovered, and validated afresh, through acts of cognition, rather than learning.

Only one who has rejected such rule by mere learning, actually knows anything. This method for development of actual knowledge, truthful knowledge, is Socratic method; it is the method of *docta ignorantia* which Luca Pacioli, Leonardo da Vinci, and Johannes Kepler, among others, adopted from the work of the intellectual founder of both the modern nation-state and experimental physical science, Cardinal Nicolaus of Cusa. It is the method of the physical science upon which modern civilization’s avoidance of a new dark age depends without exception; it is the Socratic method upon which we depend absolutely for those Classical principles of artistic composition, without which effective cooperation in the discovery and application of universal physical principles were not possible.

It was the assembly of a cadre of such leaders, typified by the case of Nicolaus of Cusa, their devotion to the Socratic method, and their passion for bringing into being a form of society consistent with the individual made in the living, cognitive image of the Creator, which made the achievements of the Renaissance possible. It was the condition of crisis produced by the preceding New Dark Age, which presented to that cadre the opportunity to undertake such a magnificent work. So, in times of greatest crisis for humanity, prayers may thus be answered: and prayers in the form of “God help me to do my duty,” may be decisive in mustering the will of the believer to bring about the answer to those prayers.

The Ecumenical Principle

On condition that the representatives of Christian civilization rid themselves of the corruption which I have summarily identified here so far, the Christian will, and must evangelize accordingly, otherwise he is not honest with himself or herself. If he is not honest with himself in such matters, why should anyone else trust his good

* Typical of that Byzantine corruption is the pro-oligarchical hoax known as “The Donation of Constantine.”

intentions? Thus, the expression of a certain truthful quality of Socratic, cognitive, not deductive, passion for what he or she believes, on that account, may not guarantee the success of an attempted ecumenical dialogue, but these Socratic qualities are indispensable for even the mere possibility of success.

Nothing is more abominable in an attempted ecumenical dialogue, than that representatives of differing faiths pollute the attempt in such ways, as putting themselves through the degrading spectacle of purporting to negotiate a plea-bargain respecting their differences, from the vantage-point of mere "sensitivity to the feelings of one another." Such immoral plea-bargaining, with disregard for essential issues of moral principle, was the cause for the failure of the recently attempted Camp David negotiations.

Nothing offends me more on this account, and justly so, than that most morally degraded of all moralists, the one whose expressed commitments are not to truth, but, rather, to affecting sensitivity toward the "feelings" of others and requiring that the other should do similarly, in return. "If you say that, you will hurt my feelings," has no legitimate right to prompt me not to tell the truth as I know it, and am prepared to prove that my views on the point are truthful. To blame Chairman Arafat, that even publicly, for his failing to submit to the terms of a proposed plea bargain, may be lawyers' standard current practice of positive law, but it is all the more immoral for just that reason.

If the parties approach one another with the expressed view, that there is no truth, but only differing opinions, differing values, you must walk away quickly from that conversation. Without a commitment to find an existing truth *in a Socratic way*, common to all, there can never be an honest agreement.

For example, there are many persons today, who tell us that they believe that man is merely another animal, and that every imaginable sort of lower species has the same rights which might be claimed for a human being. There are even well-known supporters of the candidacy of Vice President Al Gore, who insist that man is about to be scrapped by "Silicon Valley," in favor of a superior species, "thinking robots," so typified by silicon brains as also, presumably, by silicone breasts. Toward such morally debased opinions, toleration is neither required, nor allowed.

So, a dialogue among cultures must draw the line, banning certain sorts of both outrightly lunatic and obviously disgusting beliefs from the agenda. For a successful dialogue, there must be a search for unanimity on some provable universal principle, a principle of the sort which is demonstrably embedded in the nature of mankind's

relationship to the universe in which we live. The nature of those latter principles should be clear from the relevant portions of the discussion within the preceding pages of this report. What we must agree upon, is a functional definition of the nature of man, as distinct from the lower living species, and of man as the only known species which is capable of increasing its power to exist, *per capita* and *per square kilometer*, in the universe.

As I have emphasized, a dialogue focussed upon the objective of that sort of definition, is axiomatically Socratic in form. For that reason, the functional characteristic of that dialogue is cognitive, rather than deductive or symbolic. It can not be deductive, since the implied purpose of the dialogue is to detect and eradicate axiomatic assumptions which both divide us and which are demonstrably false.

Those indispensable observations on moral principle stated, what should be the objectives of an ecumenical dialogue among cultures today?

The political purpose of an ecumenical dialogue among cultures, should be centrally defined as the attempt to reach a common definition of *natural law*. The function to be performed by adoption of such a definition, is to create a principled form of agreement on the subject of constituting *a community of principle thus constituted among a group of perfectly sovereign nation-states*.

The most essential point of agreement to be reached, as an objective of the dialogue, should be agreement to three points: (a) a stated conception of a common conception of the nature of man, as I have elaborated that definition afresh in the earlier portions of the present report; (b) the definition of the nature of the perfect sovereignty of a sovereign nation-state; and, (c) the implications of the principle, that no government has legitimate authority under natural law, except as it is efficiently committed to promote the general welfare of its own population and its posterity as a whole, and to fostering the same principle in the relation among sovereign states so defined.

Apart from those crucial points of needed agreement, everything else of importance should be put on the table, so to speak, and that as frankly, as rigorously, and as passionately as possible, even if agreement on such matters is not reached presently, or envisaged for the immediately foreseeable future. By agreeing to disagree, in such a fashion, we strengthen our agreement in principle, because we have understood one another, and one's relevant passions quite clearly. So, the great Moses Mendelssohn stated his adherence to the orthodox Mosaic heritage; so, it should be among Christian, Jew, Muslim, and others today.